

Urban forestry involves the growth, management, and care of trees in and around urban areas.

An urban forest is a collection of trees (and related plants and natural resources) in and around a city including street and yard trees, park trees, and those in newly expanding suburbs. Urban forests differ from rural forests in that the growth and development of the tree cover is limited by city structures rather than forest succession and competition with other trees.

Urban forests cover some 70 million acres in the United States—the average American city has a tree canopy covering about one third of its land area. Street trees—planted and maintained by municipal governments in many cities—are estimated to make up 10% or less of the total urban tree count. Parks and greenways accommodate about 40% of the nation's urban forests. Trees in yards and other private property make up fully half of the urban forest.

Urban forests provide a multitude of benefits to residents of cities. Ecological benefits include water quality, soil conservation, air quality, and wildlife habitat. Trees give a sense of pride to communities and bring people together for planting, care and recreation. Other benefits include aesthetic improvement, and public health and welfare.

But, the health of the trees forming the urban umbrella is failing. Nationally, the average lifespan of a downtown tree is 7 to 10 years. Street trees in more open areas of cities live an average of 32 years. Trees in parks live about 50 years.¹

¹ R.I. Tree Council, Tree Stewards Education Program Handbook. 1998. Excerpted from Moll, Gary. *Urban Forests* in Elben, R.A. and Elben, W.R., eds., The Encyclopedia of the Environment. Boston; Houghton Mifflin, 1994. Pp.276-277.